

Merry Christmas!

It is time to reaffirm God's message to mankind

THE coming of Christmas signifies for the followers of Jesus Christ not only a celebration of life but also a remembrance of the need to conduct their lives on the principles of belief. The fundamental basis on which Jesus lived and for which he died was that people must love one another and share the joys and sorrows of this world because they all spring from the same Creation. The birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem was a sign that a bright new dawn had arrived for those who had long waited for a sign from the Almighty of oncoming change. For Joseph and Mary, the birth of the child Jesus was a miracle. For suffering souls in that long-ago era, it was a broad hint that fate was about to change for them. Wise men followed a star and made their way to the spot where a fresh symbol of faith awaited them.

On Christmas Day, therefore, it is an occasion of good cheer that the Christians observe and the rest of the world partakes of. The happiness is in knowing that Jesus' advent was a reaffirmation of God's message, constantly transmitted through His prophets, that all life is transitory and because it is, it must be lived in an ambience of sacrifice and in the belief that we cannot but care for one another, that we care about those less fortunate than we, that in the end we are all equal before the Lord of the Universe. The suffering Jesus went through on the Cross is for Christians all over the world the extremity that men of God can reach in their striving to create a purer soul and a better world for all people irrespective of colour, caste or any other consideration. On the Cross, it was something more than Jesus dying in the agony of pain. It was, more than anything else, a revival of the human spirit, a resurrection as it were of the soul, a manifest unwillingness to give in to injustice.

The world today celebrates the glory of Creation that Jesus Christ symbolised through the difficult paths he traversed in life and the beautiful pain he went through in death. We wish everyone and especially the Christian community in Bangladesh Merry Christmas!

Managing city's unwieldy traffic!

Answer lies in building new roads and creating adequate parking spaces

THE Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)'s ongoing drive to enforce movements of different modes of vehicles along designated lanes and debarring private cars from parking along streets reflect a certain commitment on the part of traffic police authorities to bring discipline on the roads. Some new measures have led to an untangling of traffic mess in certain places and to that extent these are welcome. Yet, given the serious physical and infra-structural constraints of limited road space relative to the size and population of the metropolis, flawed signalling arrangements and, above all, utterly inadequate parking facilities, such measures are bound to be mere palliatives to a malignant syndrome.

The focus of the traffic police at the moment is on use of lanes and penalising illegal parking. Demand by public transport operators to allocate the first lane rather than the second one may be understandable, but can it guarantee their pulling up at designated stoppages to offload and on-load rather than doing these just about anywhere. For the latter has not only multiplied risk for passengers but also aggravated traffic congestion.

As far as prohibition against parking of private vehicles along the streets goes, we have to say that it can at best be done in an extremely selective way rather than realistically enforceable as a general rule given the acute paucity of parking space along or adjoining the shopping enclaves, high-rise buildings that have mushroomed all around.

The only durable and sustainable options relate to building new roads, bypasses and creating sufficient new parking spaces in the city. An all-out effort would have to be made in these directions without ado.

In the immediate term, the government should vigorously examine and provide for the idea of engaging the private sector by giving all sorts of incentives in the act of creating parking spaces in vacant places, even if away from the city centre, and in-the-not-so-vacant spaces it may be encouraged to set up multi-tier parking lots purely as a commercial enterprise. It can be a viable business for them on a rental basis as is done in most metropolises around the world. The DCC could be involved in a catalytic role for such a venture.

As for short-term measures, an approach through trial and error taking into consideration the views of all parties concerned would be advisable to reach practicable solutions. Above all, strict adherence to traffic rules and incorruptibility of those engaged in implementing rules are the basic prerequisites for success of the present endeavour by DMP.

When politics perverted poetry

A similar tendency divided our poetic community during the nine years of autocratic regime. One group took sides with the dictator, pampered by the privileges of power. Another group stood in opposition, siding with people and their freedom.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

A popular saying has it in Nicaragua that everyone is a poet until proven otherwise. What about the rest of the world? Poets spring from their soils, and every soil isn't equally fertile to bear a bounteous crop. Khaled Hosseini writes in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that amongst all the provinces of Afghanistan, one couldn't stretch a leg in Herat "without poking a poet."

The density of poets is a measure of people's passionate intensity for poetic predilections. In the '70s that intensity was high in this country, and my publisher friends vouch that it was the Golden Age of poetry with the highest number of poetry books published in any one decade. Then poetic interest started to fizzle. In the '80s, poetry entered a dry spell as the number of people writing poetry gradually declined.

From which it never recovered. Is it mere coincidence that the '80s was also the time in this country when poetry and people were subjected to the burlesque of a dictator? That was the first and only time in our history when a ruling hand usurped both poetry and politics, so much so that an exasperated poet vented his frustration in one harsh sentence. Roughly translated into English, he wrote that every rascal wanted to become a poet.

Mapping the terrain of history, it was also the time when poetry and people began to degenerate. That was when the power of imagination was undermined by the imagination of power. Michael Hamburger argues in his essay "Absolute Poetry and Absolute Politics" that poets who connect with the Romantic-Symbolist tradition suffer from a high degree of isolation and alienation from society. These poets are attracted to absolute political creeds, mistaking their monomania for a dedication akin to their own.

That explains why American expatriate poet Ezra Pound came to admire Mussolini. South African poet Roy Campbell supported Spanish dictator Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. German poet Gottfried Benn was a Nazi loyalist. Roman poet Horace deeply and sincerely admired Augustus.

A similar tendency divided our poetic community during the nine years of autocratic regime. One group took sides with the dictator, pampered by the privileges of power. Another group stood in opposition, siding with people and their freedom. But poetry and politics don't have to be mutually exclusive. From Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton of ancient days to Robert Lowell and Seamus Heaney of modern times, poets have used poetry to brush with oppressive rulers. There are also instances when rulers courted poetry. Henry VIII was fond of writing poems even though he was a cruel husband to his wives. Chairman Mao of China, Leopold Senghor, former president of Senegal, and Jose Sarney, former president of Brazil, were also poets.

John F. Kennedy, the former US president, was an avid reader of Robert Frost. "When power narrows the areas of man's concern," said Kennedy, "poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses." To summarise, the best in poetry guards against the worst in politics.

In the '80s, something terrible happened in our country. Those two extremes were compromised. A dictator actually seduced poetry to strengthen his politics, and successfully lined up a following of poets. In spite of resistance from renegade poets, poetry was inveigled into his political ambition. Power narrowed poetry, and poetry narrowed the areas of our concern.

No wonder that dictator was able to rule longer than legitimate rulers. He destroyed the innocence in poetry and people, which snapped the defiant spirit in both. Poetry is a special type of communication, and so is politics. Both target the people with an identical goal.

How? The poets start the conversation, and they expect readers to have the last words. Ideally, it should be similar in politics. The politicians should start the conversation, and expect the voters to have the last words.

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Are they turning in their graves?

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dictator exploited poetry to deflect the resistance against him. He impostered poetic identity not so much out of love for poetry, but to use poetry as a ploy to consolidate his brand of politics.

In the process, he diminished both poetry and people. The great chaos that ensued brought down a paroxysm of perfidy. Corruption, complacency, complicity and compromise raged, and they still do, through our lives with culture-like ferocity.

This dictator wasn't known for his poetry before he rose to power. He isn't writing poetry ever since he has been ousted from power. Meanwhile, the damage has been done. Politics interloped into poetry, and ruined that profound something in each one of us. Rhyme and reason are gone from our life.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a columnist for The Daily Star. E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com

Separate strategy needed

Unless the left-outs understand that the world is not geared towards caring for the less fortunate and historically speaking no country has much cared about the other, formulating policies and action will be easier by them. Copenhagen has shown that one has to take care of oneself. The developed countries have done so; it is time the developing poor and the worst-affected countries did so too

ENAYETULLAH KHAN

COPENHAGEN, as many had feared, delivered very little. The developed world once again used its clout to deny a fair deal for all other countries, particularly the worst hit ones. Many had gone to the meeting expecting a great accord with legally binding clauses but what it produced was a "thin deal" even by the UN, which is a professionally optimistic body. Many are saying that this is the first step and some have said that the process will go on for a better deal, but it's going to be more disappointment if one expects all this. The poor countries have basically been left to fend for themselves as they have no clout in the world of international negotiations.

The three main groups -- developed,

developing and the hard hit -- are not on the same page. The developed world faces two problems. How does it comply with scientific facts and common sense and agree to binding targets that will inevitably put a dampener on its own economic system? The other does not know how to agree to a global deal that will take the interest of all nations into account when political systems are geared towards thinking in terms of just one's own country.

The emerging countries are actually in a more difficult position because, to ensure economic growth, they need to consume more carbon and as they have large populations, despite individually low carbon footprints, the total consumption is high. So they are high polluters even though most of their people are poor. This situation is being referred to by the developed world as they

are demanding a global cut that will greatly hamper the poverty alleviation policies of the emerging world. What the developed world is in effect asking for is that everyone should stop where they are -- a sort of a lock-in -- which means the poor can't become less poor through economic programmes in the developing world as the West did. Naturally, the emerging economies in particular have opposed this position, which has provided a window to the industrial world to ask for cuts across the board, and the impasse has allowed the developed world to carry on business as usual.

The worst affected group's vulnerability

The third category are the poorest, least developed and worst affected countries, which includes Bangladesh and parts of Asia, the island states and large parts of Africa, which have loud voices but are not listened to. Although this is common knowledge, these countries will lose land or altogether disappear, suffer food shortage, high rates of old and new diseases and many other negatives, but the world hasn't bothered much about them. The lesson from history is that the weak are not listened to.

The existing negotiating system has left no option for the affected countries except to wait for small mercies and crumbs from the high table of international power, unless they gain some leverage that can

make the big powers listen. The chances of any international effort will not go beyond the setting up of the climate fund as has happened.

The highly affected and the poor countries must now see the need to form another bloc apart from the wider one led by China, where they can discuss how to apply pressure and what strategies to take on behalf of the third group. It should also look at the scenarios which make the developed countries sit up and take notice as they have been ignored for long by them. While one must remain part of the developing country group, one must also remember that conflict with them is inevitable as their economies charge forward and they too move away from the worst hit group.

The diplomacy of the post-Copenhagen world will have to be far more robust and imaginative than it has ever been before. Unless the left-outs understand that the world is not geared towards caring for the less fortunate and historically speaking no country has much cared about the other, formulating policies and action will be easier by them. Copenhagen has shown that one has to take care of oneself. The developed countries have done so; it is time the developing poor and the worst-affected countries did so too.

Enayetullah Khan is Chairman, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh.

What's at stake

The Copenhagen Accord, while it acknowledged the 2-degrees-by-2050 threshold, failed to specify the steps that would bring the world safely under the limit, and under deadline. What's at stake, then, is both macro and micro:

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BEFORE we get lost in the exchange of increasingly bitter words over who was to blame for the disappointing outcome of the Copenhagen climate change negotiations, let us reconsider what was at stake -- in particular, for a developing country like the Philippines.

We are not among the worst sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Far from it, as President Macapagal-Arroyo noted in her speech before the UN forum, we emit an estimated 1.6 tons of CO2 equivalent per capita. In contrast, the global average is currently 6 tons per head, and one objective of the two-year negotiations which culminated in Copenhagen was to lower this world average to 3 tons per capita.

But we share the predicament of many developing countries: We bear relatively little responsibility for global warming, and yet we are among the most vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change. President Arroyo reminded other heads of

government: "The UN reports that the Philippines is one of the top 12 countries at the greatest risk from climate change. We top the list of nations most in danger of facing more frequent and more intense storms as the impact of climate change intensifies."

It was in our best interests, then, for Copenhagen to succeed unequivocally, success being defined as a firm agreement on substantial reductions in emissions on the part of the developed world and an equally robust agreement on providing funding for developing countries to fight the effects of climate change. That the so-called Copenhagen Accord produced neither (except for a "fast start" fund of \$30 billion in the next three years) means that the country's best interests were not served.

We must therefore add our voice and our resources, including the skills of our very able negotiators, to "complete Copenhagen" in the shortest possible time. This means working in concert with allies

like the United States and partners like China to forge a legally binding agreement in 12 months at the latest.

This is much more difficult than it looks. The first casualty of the incomplete Copenhagen negotiations was the process itself. The momentum that had been built up over the last two years, since the conference in Bali, Indonesia, is at great risk of dissipating. In 2001, the world trade talks in Doha ended inconclusively; the negotiators looked to the next round of talks in Mexico to resume the discussions. More than eight years later, the trade talks remain moribund.

Much the same thing can happen to the UN-sponsored climate talks, the next round of which is (again) scheduled to resume in Mexico. If the momentum is lost, what is possibly the most complex international negotiating process in history can lose itself, for years, in endless debate.

Unfortunately for all of us, there is no time to waste. Despite the recent and curiously timed scandal called (naturally, if unimaginatively) "Climategate," the scientific consensus remains robust. The fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, released in 2007, marshalled the clearest evidence yet that human intervention is at the core of global warming.

An interpretation of the scientific data, popularised by the European Union and

later accepted by many other countries, posits that the worst effects of climate change can be contained if average world temperature by 2050 rises by no more than 2 degrees Celsius from the pre-Industrial Age estimate. (The evidence is that, since that time, average world temperature has already risen by about 70 percent of one degree.)

The 2-degree limit is a far from settled issue (low-lying islands states like the Maldives argue that the limit should be 1.5 degrees or even lower). But the Copenhagen Accord, while it acknowledged the 2-degrees-by-2050 threshold, failed to specify the steps that would bring the world safely under the limit, and under deadline.

What's at stake, then, is both macro and micro: Nothing less than the fate of the planet itself, and at the same time the fate of the negotiating process, too. The Philippines cannot afford to stand on the sidelines, just because it's a developing country. It must, using its coalition-building skills and its negotiating expertise and in close concert with other at-risk countries, work on the frontlines. Because when it comes to the adverse impact of climate change, that's exactly where it's at.

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